

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT *UPDATE*

February 1998

Danville fire tests city's response plans

by Doug Young, CEM
Emergency Services Coordinator
City of Danville

What is it with holidays in Danville? Since I became emergency services coordinator almost two years ago, I have not had good experiences with the holidays. One of the most memorable occurred during Labor Day weekend when Danville was visited with two record-breaking storms. The first brought about a foot of rain within 16 hours that destroyed neighborhoods in the city. Barely had the rain stopped when Hurricane Fran came through. Most of Virginia was declared a disaster area, and for Danville, this was the first Presidential declaration since the

early 1970s.

From this experience, we created the Emergency Management Response Group (EMRG) composed of city employees from various departments, and volunteers from the emergency services community, all trained by our department. At this point, the group is made up of five teams: the EOC, Recovery/Damage Assessment, Media, Shelter/Evacuation and Critical Incident Stress Debriefing teams. Depending on the need, all, some, or even parts of the teams can be activated for local emergencies. We deploy our city employee team members so that no department will be severely short-staffed during an emergency.

As 1997 neared its end, I thought we might escape with no holiday troubles until I received a page from the city's EOC on Thanksgiving night. The call was to a fire that became one of the worst residential fires in Danville's history. It occurred at the Cabin Lake condo complex, a 128-unit apartment building located on a man-made lake. The fire left over 250 people homeless, destroyed 36 units and damaged another 48.

All five EMRG teams were activated. Two teams, the EOC and the Shelter team, coordinated deployment of the city's mobile command post and set up a temporary shelter for displaced residents at the nearby National Guard Armory.

Because of the holidays, EOC/EMRG people were at home with their families. However, alpha-numeric pagers gave them quick and detailed messages from the EOC. Mass transit buses were called in to assist with transporting the large number of people who helped with the evacuation, and the American Red Cross opened a Family Assistance Registration Center to help victims of the fire.

By the end of the response, we had five active operations occurring: the EOC response, the Red Cross Family Assistance Center, the fire-scene investigation, shelter and the Disaster Recovery Center (DRC). Through communication with the
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Gilmore appoints head of public safety

In December, Governor Jim Gilmore named as his Secretary of Public Safety former police officer, prosecutor and Deputy Attorney General Gary Aronhalt. In his new post, Aronhalt oversees the State Police, the National Guard, VDES, Fire Programs, the ABC Board, the Department of Corrections, the Virginia Parole Board and other public safety agencies related to criminal justice.

Aronhalt attended Harvard University on a full academic scholarship where he earned a bachelor of arts degree in 1971 in government. He then joined the Arlington County Police Department as a street officer, and during his seven years with the force, completed his law degree at American University.

After graduation from law school in 1978, Aronhalt served as court officer with the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services. In 1979, he was appointed an Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney in Henrico County.

When Gilmore headed the office from 1988 to 1993, Aronhalt was appointed First Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney. In 1994, newly elected Attorney General Gilmore appointed Aronhalt Deputy Attorney General. During this time, Aronhalt spearheaded reforms in adult and juvenile criminal laws, established a program that brings senior citizens together with law enforcement officials and set up the Financial Crimes and Money Laundering unit in the Office of Attorney General.

Speaking to emergency services people across the state, Aronhalt said, "I respect your outstanding contributions and service in assisting the citizens of Virginia when they are hit with natural or man-made disasters and emergencies. Over the years, your professionalism and dedication have been enormous comfort to many Virginia families. I look forward to working with you and your client agencies during the next four years."

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SAME technology speeds weather warnings

by Bill Sammler

Warning Coordination Meteorologist
Wakefield Forecast Office

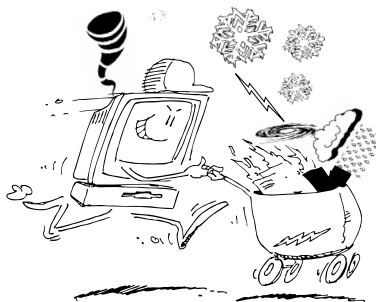
Many of you are aware of the replacement of the Emergency Broadcast System (EBS) with the Emergency Alert System (EAS) on January 1, 1997. EBS was a throwback to the Cold War and was designed to allow for rapid public alert to catastrophes such as nuclear attack. The National Weather Service (NWS) utilized EBS to warn the public of life-threatening tornadoes and flash floods.

EBS was a manual, labor-intensive system of warning/alert dissemination. EAS is designed to automate this warning process. All radio and commercial television stations are now required to have an operational EAS decoder.

All large cable systems (10,000 customers or more) must have EAS equipment operational by the end of 1998, while smaller cable systems will have until October 1, 2002, to complete their EAS upgrade. Once an EAS decoder is programmed, it can operate without human intervention and be interfaced with a radio or television station's

equipment to either alert broadcasters of a warning/alert, or interrupt normal programming to broadcast the unaltered EAS alert message.

EAS, like EBS, is a voluntary system. That means that most radio/TV stations are not required to



rebroadcast EAS activations, but can if they desire.

Some stations become an active part of the EAS in their state.

Each state has a State Primary for intrastate activa-

tions (WRVA-AM in Virginia), a National Primary for all national EAS alerts (WRXL-FM in Richmond for Virginia), and a number of Local Primary (LP-1 and LP-2) stations. EAS alerts are received by the appropriate sites and rebroadcast and/or transmitted to adjacent LP-1/LP-2 sites.

The NWS interfaces with EAS through NOAA Weather Radio via the Specific Area Message Encoder (SAME) technology. SAME allows the NWS to encode severe weather warnings, ranging from tornadoes and flash floods to hurricanes and winter storms, into a format compatible with EAS decoders. Digital bursts of

information are sent over NOAA Weather Radio when a warning is "tone alerted." These digital bursts tell the EAS encoder what the warning is about, how long the warning will be effective and which areas are being warned. The encoder will then "listen" for up to two minutes for an audio warning message and/or "trailer" codes that signify the end of the warning transmission.

The advantage of the EAS/NOAA Weather Radio interface is clear. Warnings can be **immediately** retransmitted over commercial radio and television, providing the public with greater advance notice of impending severe weather. The public can also take advantage of the NOAA Weather Radio/EAS interface through SAME-compatible NOAA Weather Radio receivers. These receivers can be programmed by the user to "tone alert" for specific counties/cities within a NOAA Weather Radio broadcast area. Currently, consumer-grade models of these receivers are available only through Radio Shack, although additional manufacturers are expected to market SAME-compatible NOAA Weather Radios later this year.

For more information, contact Bill Sammler at 757/899-4200, ext.223, e-mail william.sammler@noaa.gov

Danville Fire

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Virginia Department of Emergency Services, we found that we were eligible for an Administrative Disaster Declaration from the Small Business Administration. This authorized the recovery team to set up a DRC and, through the SBA and other state and city programs, provide assistance to the residents and the owners of the condo complex.

One of our greatest assets was the VDES Reservist Program members who came to assist at the DRC and with donations management. These trained professionals were able

to take a load of work from our city staff. The Reservist Program has great potential and promises to be a real asset to local emergency services coordinators. Some other helpful hints include:

- ☐ Promote the state emergency management training to your city government to familiarize them with disaster response;
- ☐ Assign someone to the media from the start and make sure this person speaks for all the involved groups; and
- ☐ Encourage participation at those yearly drills. People will learn their roles during a response and your operations will be enhanced in the real event.

Virginia hosts national event

When Norfolk hosts NCEM's 46th annual conference November 7-10 this year, Virginia's emergency managers have a priceless opportunity to highlight their accomplishments to the nation as well as actively participate in planning the event.

Put in your bid to make a presentation at the conference on any subject related to emergency management. The deadline to submit abstracts for presentations is March 10.

The submitted abstracts will be reviewed at the NCEM Mid-Year Meeting, March 14-17 in Emmitsburg. A scheduled visit to Capitol Hill is planned for March 17, offering attendees the opportunity to speak with their elected representatives.

In addition, a number of planning committees are looking for volunteers. If you want the invaluable experience of helping put together a national conference with a worldwide audience, plan to attend and participate.

For more information or for the address to which you mail your abstract, call Wanda Reed, conference committee member, at 540/853-2425.

HAZ MAT



Hazmat issues in 1998

by Greg Britt
VDES Hazmat Field Manager

Once again it's a new year and several issues from 1997 will no doubt roll over into 1998. Let's address just a few of these. The most important to consider is safety. From first responders to emergency managers, anyone who has dealt with hazardous materials emergencies is aware of hazardous materials and their dangers. In Virginia, our emergency services are well prepared to handle a range of hazmat incidents. It is when hazardous materials are not suspected that there may be unforeseen danger.

The past couple of years have demonstrated that hazardous materials incidents occur, not only when there is an overturned tanker truck, a chemical explosion or facility spill, but in natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes and tornadoes. After any kind of event where materials have been moved and uncovered by floodwaters, high winds or other forces, anyone — from damage assessment teams to first responders — must be aware of the possibility of finding hazardous materials embedded in piles of debris or stagnant water. Unless the people on site are properly trained, the safest actions to take are to secure and isolate the scene and notify the appropriate authorities.

This brings to mind a very real question — how diverse are the skills of your personnel? Specialty teams can be brought in from the state or federal government, but it takes time to activate these teams and transport them to the site. Meanwhile, the emergency or disaster at the local level continues, and some safety precautions must be taken immediately.

In a complex disaster or emergency response and with limited local and state personnel and resources, our staff needs to be diverse in all aspects of emergency management.

Managers and responders must be informed on terrorism, clandestine drug labs and environmental crimes; knowledgeable about federal, state, environmental, transportation, and occupational laws and aware of cutting-edge technology in response.

How do you obtain all this training with scarce resources? Both state and local government must develop or continue to work on their relationships with industry, other state and local agencies, transportation companies, large chemical manufacturers and other organizations that can provide/share resources such as training sites, equipment, funding and knowledge. In Virginia, these kinds of partnerships have already greatly benefited the taxpayers and industry.

We must exercise, plan and drill with other localities, industries, and state and federal agencies. New ideas are constantly redefining the hazardous materials field and we need to make these ideas work for us. What works for one locality or agency may not for another, but if we are flexible and creative, we can modify good ideas and use them to enhance our operations.

Chesterfield hosts classes for dispatchers

Your dispatchers are integral to your emergency services organization and you don't want to let their skills and abilities stagnate. Coach them along by providing career development training.

The Chesterfield County Emergency Communications Center is hosting a series of



classes this year designed to develop both the technical knowledge and supervisory skills of dispatch workers. Classes are hands-on and, when appropriate, cover liability issues and other related legal areas.

Class offerings include 9-1-1/TTY training; an advanced course for Communications Center supervisors that covers policies, leadership, motivation, counseling and special projects; a "train-the-trainer" course that

instructs students how to teach, evaluate and document the performance of new-hire trainees and a law enforcement dispatch course that addresses the dispatcher's roles and duties, responder protection,

prioritization, crisis intervention, suicide calls, domestic violence calls and other topics.

A stress identification

and management course, designed specifically for communications people, helps students identify stress factors and offers proactive solutions for stress reduction.

The cost ranges from \$100-\$279 for each course. For more information or for a brochure that includes course descriptions, dates, times, costs, lodging information and course registration phone numbers, call Pearl Goff at 804/796-7066.

VDES catalog available

Call now to get your updated VDES 1998 *Video and Publications Catalog*. Take advantage of this resource and order your brochures, CDs, videos and other educational materials in time for your next public outreach effort or tap into our collection year round.

Check out the newest addition to the VDES video collection titled *Before Disaster Strikes*, produced by Building Officials and Code Administrators International working in conjunction with FEMA. The focus is on building departments with successful mitigation programs, and the video offers advice and effective implementation strategies in the event of a natural disaster.

Educate your board of supervisors with a pertinent video or informative brochure during your next presentation. Your imagination is the only limit!

To order, call Bertha Jackson at 804/897-6510.

Training Calendar



EOC Management and Operations

February 17-19
Newport News

Developing Volunteer Resources

February 18-19
Culpeper

EOC Management and Operations

February 23-25
Danville

Hazardous Weather and Flood Preparedness

March 3-5
VDES in Richmond

Emergency Action Plans for Dams

March 11
Leesburg
For information, call Curt Nellis,
Region II Coordinator,
at 540/829-7371

Disaster Response and Recovery Operations

March 17-19
Roanoke

Mass Fatality Incident Management

March 17-19
VDES in Richmond

Status Assessment Facilitators Workshop

March 24-25
VDES in Richmond

Instructional Presentation Skills

March 24-26
Fairfax

Status Assessment Facilitators Workshop

April 2-3
Region I

Exercise Design

April 27-28
Region I

Developing Volunteer Resources

April 29-30
Region I

ICS/EOC Interface

May 6-7
Waynesboro

Coordinators' Briefing

May 13-14
Culpeper

Disaster Response and Recovery Operations

May 18-20
Manassas
For information, call the VDES
Training Office at 804/897-6559

Technological Hazards Division

Hazardous Materials — First Responder Operations for the EMS Provider

February 21-22
Salem

Hazardous Materials Technician

March 9-20
Martinsville

Team Leader Annual Meeting

March 24-25
Newport News
(enrollment limited to members of
state contract teams)
For information, call Greg Britt
at 804/897-6578

Chemistry of Hazardous Materials

April 6-17
Roanoke
For information, call the VDES Tech
Haz Division at 804/897-6573

Search and Rescue

GSAR Institute

January 16-18 (Part I)
February 20-22 (Part II)
Roanoke

Managing Search Operations

March 20-22 (Part I)
April 17-19 (Part II)
Shenandoah County
For information, call Winnie
Pennington at 804/674-2422

Conferences

Virginia Emergency Management Association Conference

February 11-13, 1998
Virginia Beach
For information, call Chris Eudailey
at 540/582-7095

SFCAV Midwinter Conference

February 27-March 1, 1998
Virginia Beach
For information, call Janet Areson
at 804/649-8471

In conjunction with this conference,
the following course is offered:

Public Safety Response to Terrorism — Management Considerations

February 26-27
For information, call Ron Hargrave
at 804/897-6573

National Hurricane Conference

April 6-10
Norfolk
For information, call Jim Talbot
at 757/441-5600

1998 Annual Conference on Technology in Emergency Management

April 21-24, 1998
Virginia Beach
For information, call Mark Pennington
at 804/897-6532

In conjunction with this conference,
the following course is offered:

Cameo Workshop

April 21
For information, call George Roarty
at 804/897-6574

NASAR Annual Conference

May 27-30
Portland, Oregon
For information, call Mylea Wade
at 703/222-6277

Public Safety Educators' Conference

August 7-9
Richmond
For information, call Carolyn Sanford
at 804/861-0263



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